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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN, DANISH FMS MEET WITH MUSLIM
REPRESENTATIVES ON CARTOON ISSUE

This cable is sensitive but unclassified

¶1. (U) Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, in her capacity as EU Council President, and Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller held an informal meeting with leading Muslim Representatives in Vienna on February 16. Participants included the leader of the Islamic Faith Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Reis-I-Ulema Mustafa Cerić; the grand mufti of Syria, Ahmed Bader Eddin Hassoun; and the president of the Islamic Faith Community in Austria, Professor Anas Schakfeh. The Bishop of Lolland-Falster, Steen Skovsgaard (Church of Denmark) also took part. The Foreign Ministry released a meeting summary and talking points after the meeting, both of which are available on the Embassy's EU Presidency SIPRnet Web site.

¶2. (U) In a solo press conference following the meeting, Plassnik lauded the "small, concrete steps forward" achieved in the meeting, saying it had taken place "in an atmosphere of reflection and frankness" and in the spirit of Austria's tradition of promoting dialogue between different parties. She noted that the participants were well known, experienced "bridge builders" with a grass roots connection to Muslim communities. In Plassnik's view, the meeting had reflected the will of all parties to seek solutions for defusing the current confrontation and engaging in sustained constructive dialogue. She stressed that all participants had forcefully rejected violence as a means of resolving disputes.

¶3. (U) Plassnik cited some key messages from this meeting, including:
-- The need to find grass roots support for the dialogue;
-- The need for Europe to embrace both Muslims in Europe and its Islamic partners in the world;
-- The determination to build upon "the small network of bridge builders established today;"
-- The intent to foster this dialogue at the youth level, particularly through UNESCO venues.

¶4. (U) Responding to a press question as to whether Turkey was an important bridge builder in this conflict, Plassnik recalled the Turkish-Spanish "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative under the UN umbrella and confirmed that Turkey has a "special role and special commitment" in this conflict.

Q&A session

¶5. (U) Plassnik pointedly declined to answer some of the tougher press question, such as whether EU countries should buy more Danish products to counteract the current boycott,

or whether under the EU's solidarity clause an attack on Danish embassies and Denmark in general should be seen as an attack on the entire EU.

¶16. (SBU) COMMENT: While the dialogue in the meeting may indeed have been productive, public perception in Austria was that it did not fulfill expectations. The press corps in attendance was surprised that none of the other participants, especially Danish ForMin Moeller, joined Plassnik for the press conference. However, Foreign Ministry officials we spoke to afterwards were far more upbeat about the outcome.
McCaw